

# NATURE'S

## Grapevine

WASHINGTON CROSSING STATE PARK, NJ

SPRING 2006

### Native Americans in the Region of Washington Crossing State Park

by  
Jim Wade

We recognize Washington Crossing State Park today as a great historic and recreational resource for people to enjoy while walking, hiking, exploring, picnicking, fishing, camping, exercising or engaging in and/or watching athletic events. It is also a place of learning about nature and history and a place where one can draw meaningful connections with both the cultural and natural environments. The park also provides a variety of scheduled talks, walks and other events available for the public to enjoy year-round.

The area we refer to nowadays as Washington Crossing State Park was a very different place prior to European settlement 350 years ago. The area was inhabited with different kinds of

people with unique societies and differing livelihoods, all interacting together on a very different regional countryside. These native people, survived more or less, on a day-to-day basis by making tools of stone, wood, bone, antler and shell, hunting wild game animals, gathering plants from the landscape for food and medicine and growing crops. They migrated with the seasons for better hunting and fishing grounds. They moved about seeking better land to farm, better areas to build their shelters to protect them from the elements, and they traveled about to various quarrying areas or places containing stone resources for making tools.

New Jersey, during the period of the Indians, was densely covered with forests with a mix of fields, marshes, wetlands and woods, and the landscape harbored a variety of wild game animals. The Indian inhabitants hunted and fished all along the Delaware River and it's many tributary streams, such as the Jacobs Creek, Fiddlers Creek, and Moores Creek near WCSP. Native Americans living along the banks of these waterways lived in bark and hide-covered shelters made of saplings in small spread-out settlements or villages throughout the Delaware Valley.

*(continued next page)*



### THE INDIANS OF SPRING

In the spring, life began to return to the land. The sky would be full of many canada geese, mallards, herons, and other migratory birds returning to the region. Spawning fish such as shad and river herring would return by the end of March or in early April, when water temperatures became warmer. The Indians learned from experience to read the many different signs of nature and judged when to return to traditional river fishing areas and get together with family and friends. Many of these fish stayed in the rivers and streams until October, when colder water compelled many of them to return to the deeper ocean. The spring would have been a joyous reunion for aboriginal Americans, as families reunited and shared in the workload of hunting, fishing, gathering wild plants, cultivating the soil and sowing seeds for their garden crops. They would cut small trees to make drying racks and build fires to smoke-dry the fish they caught. Fish were cooked, roasted, baked and eaten, but large numbers of smoked and dried fish were packed away for the months to come.

Deer, bear, and elk, were hunted in the traditional way by spear or bow and arrow. Many small animals such as rabbit, ground hog, turkey, and fox, being tempted by the Indians' gardens, were caught in spring traps and snares places near the garden and along paths. Men and boys hunted various animals, including waterfowl and marsh birds, and women and children gathered eggs from bird nests and searched out turtles and shellfish to eat. In addition to fishing and gathering shellfish and crayfish, the Indians searched the edges of lakes, rivers, and marshes for frogs, turtles, and snakes, all of which were valued for food.

Gathering wild plants In the spring was an ongoing task for women and children who would venture into the fields, forests, marshes, and streams to search for edible and useful plants, roots, and tubers, as well as fruits and berries, mushrooms and nuts. Experience had also taught the people which plants were edible, and which plants had medicinal properties. The Indians knew well the proper time for planting and harvesting. They were guided by the moon and stars in this endeavor. The Pleiades, a bright star cluster most visible in the wintertime, was particularly useful for planting. As the Pleiades began to fade from the western sky about the beginning of May, it was time to prepare the soil and plant seeds. In October, when this constellation reemerged, the time was right for harvesting crops.

Coming back from their winter hunting camps to their springtime river valleys, the Indians watched for the return of the animals and the emergence of new plants. Spring provided the opportunity to renew acquaintances, arrange upcoming marriages between family members, trade, barter and recount stories of the past winter's hunt. - Jim Wade



## Volunteer Notes

**Lou Beck** of **Washington Crossing Audubon**, conducted a great winter bird walk in March.

Many thanks go to our volunteers **Cheryl Burgos**, Morrisville, **Jenny Schwing**, Robbinsville, **Terri Miller**, West Trenton, **Nettie Rekowski**, Ewing and **Greg Baber**, Yardley for coming out to assist with a variety of winter events.

We would also like to thank **Washington Crossing Audubon** for donating \$150.00 for bird food for our feeding stations.

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Anyone interested in volunteering at the Nature Center should give us a call. Volunteer time is flexible and jobs vary from simply staffing the facility to writing newsletter articles to conducting outdoor education and interpretive events and/or assisting with such events.

**Native Americans...** Historically, we know the name of the Indians that lived in New Jersey during the Late Woodland Period (ca. A.D. 1000 – 1600) as the Delaware or Lenape people. The name means, “common folk or ordinary people” in the Delaware language. Many different groups of indigenous people inhabited the local landscape prior to this era going back in time even to the last ice age. These cultures are generally credited with being the peoples from whom the Lenape culture eventually evolved. These groups emigrated from different areas of the country such as the Southeast and regions to the west and north, and took up residency over thousands of years, in what is nowadays called New Jersey. These different groups sometimes stayed for long periods of time, others seemed to stay for shorter duration, but all these Indian groups helped to make up the ancestral past of New Jersey’s cultural inheritance. Most of our knowledge of these Indian peoples derives from the stone tools and weapons they left behind and from the discoveries made by archaeologists over the years.

The daily lives of Native Americans were quite precarious and uncertain at times depending on the availability of food, the severity of the weather, the probability of accidents, the persistence of diseases and health problems as well as other factors in the environment. Each day, one had obstacles to face and life and death choices to make whether on the hunt, gather-

ing wild plants, tending gardens, preparing food, fashioning tools, shelters, traps, clothing or interacting with other Indian groups. Game and useful plants were not always readily available nearby and resources often became exhausted. The people had to constantly seek out new resources and establish sources of food, firewood and stone in order to survive. Consequently, these people were often on the move.

### Indian Paths and Trails

The Native People did not have horses or other livestock to ride or pull carts. These people either walked the countryside or traveled by waterway in dugout canoes. They utilized a network of foot trails that led to various destinations of natural resources, and related villages throughout New Jersey. Some of these trails simply followed natural stream and river corridors. Other paths and trails developed as the result of the constant foot travel over the same routes. Many of these Indian trails were originally made by wildlife such as elk and deer. Factors that would determine the course of a trail or path would be the fordability of streams, the location of villages, the selection of dry uplands for ease of travel and of course, the intended destination. Because of the frequent movement of the Indians and their village camps, these paths became distinctly defined. Most of the later early historic stagecoach routes and subsequently, many modern-day roads and highways follow these ancient Indian trails.

One of the main Indian trails that went through the central New Jersey region was known as the Assunpink or *Ah-senping* Trail. This Indian path led a course from the Assunpink Creek at the Falls on the Delaware at Trenton, northeastward toward New Brunswick, and across the Raritan River. This trail ran along what today would be portions of Routes 206 and 27. The Falls at Trenton was known to the Lenape as *Chickihoke* (at the tumbling bank) and *Maskeki’ tong* (the stony falls). On some early maps of New Jersey, the colonists referred to this area as “Sanhican Falls”, after the name of a band of Lenape people living in the area.



A recreated Lenape longhouse with a village garden in the foreground, is shown above.

Another historically documented Indian trail in the area of WCSP was known as the Malayelick path and connected an Indian village along the Assunpink in Trenton, with a village, called Lopatcong, located at the Forks of the Delaware, near Phillipsburg. This trail went by a Native American village near Marshall's Corner in Hopewell Twp, through another Indian settlement in the vicinity of Rocktown, through a region called *Paatquacktung* west of Copper Hill in modern-day Delaware Twp. and northward. This would have run along portions of present day Routes 31 and 579. The name of the Malayelick Trail may have come from the Algonkian-Delaware word, *Makeley-achick*, meaning "many going".

### Native American Villages

The occurrence of indigenous peoples in the area of WCSP is well documented both archaeologically and via deeds, land grants and other documents dating from colonial times. In the Trenton/Bordentown area, the Abbott Farm site has been extensively excavated by archaeologists for many years. Thousands of Indian artifacts have been found all along the terraces and bluffs of the Delaware River, from Trenton southward. A variety



of stone tools and pottery attest to the longevity of the Indians occupying this location. Native Americans would not only have lived along the various streams near WCSP, but consistently up and down the banks of the Delaware where they could have taken advantage of an abundance of fish, waterfowl and other wildlife.

At least three Indian villages are historically recorded to have

occurred in the area. The first Indian village was known by the name of Honehonickon (1683) and was located at the Falls of Trenton. This village shows up in land deeds but no mention of it occurs in later historic documents. There were two Indian villages mentioned in the early land deeds for Hopewell Twp. by the name of Wishalemensey (1688-1703), located along Stony Brook and also at Rocktown, along the Malayelick Trail. Wishalemensey was the apparent home of a Lenape leader or sachem named Coponnochus (or Caponokonickon). The Indian village of Minnipeson (1686-1706) was located between the towns of Hopewell and Blawenburg (also referenced as being situated near Marshall's Corner). There was also an Indian village at Lambertville, called Nishalemese, but this is so close in spelling to Wishalemensey that it may be an extended settlement or seasonal encampment of either of the previously mentioned villages. No other details or any other information is known about these local Indian villages.

Many of Central Jersey's hills, valleys, and streams, lakes hamlets and parks are to this day still known by some of



their original Indian names. Crosswicks, Assunpink, Woosamonsa, Manalapan, Cheesequake are just a few. It is for us today to imagine what Indian life might have been like, several hundred to thousands of years ago in central New Jersey. Sounds and images of family bands of Native Americans interacting in a variety of daily activities around their cooking fires, homes, gardens, fields, shoreline and forest are silenced now by the passage of time. Today, our towns and cities have replaced what once were Indian villages, plantations, and hunting grounds. In remoter areas, where the Indian once had their abode, there remain only the empty fields of tall grass and scattered trees, where once stood clusters of wigwams and longhouses with their curling wood smoke, ascending lightly from Native American hearths, through the openings of bark-framed rooftops. ♀

### References

Grumet, Robert Steven *We Are Not So Great Fools: Changes In Upper Delawaran Socio-Political Life 1630 –1758*, Rutgers University, UMI Dissertation Services 1979.

Kraft, Herbert C. *The Lenape-Delaware Indian Heritage - 10,000 BC to AD 2000*, Lenape Books, 2001.

Philhower, Charles A. "Know Your State: Indian Lore of New Jersey", Twelve articles reprinted from Newark Sunday News. (date not available)

Philhower, Charles A. "The Aborigines of Hunterdon County", *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society Journal*. ns:11:508-525. 1926.

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Jim Wade worked as a field archaeologist and an archaeological field assistant at several Indian sites throughout Central Jersey including the Abbot Farm in White Horse. Jim also worked as an archivist with the State Museum documenting Native American land holdings from the 17th and 18th centuries. He is a frequent volunteer at WCSP where he assists with our Native American and primitive technologies events. Mr. Wade is available for talks and demonstrations to groups. His e-mail address is "Red9Hawk@aol.com". Mr. Wade will be giving a presentation here at the Nature Center on April 22. (see the enclosed program schedule for more information).

## SCHEDULE OF SHOWS OPEN-AIR THEATRE SUMMER, 2006

### Comedy of Errors

June 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17

Shakespeare 70

### A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum

June 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, July 1

Pennington Players

### Music Man

July 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15

Yardley Players

### My Fair Lady

July 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29

Actors NET

### Cinderella

August 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12

Playful Productions

### Grease

August 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26

Stars in the Park

## AROUND THE PARK

The Nature Center had a busy winter season. Seven classes from Hopewell Twp. and a local home school group came out for a series of geology presentations called "Rocks in the Making". Immediately following the geology activities we commenced our annual maple sugaring operations. The Nature Center provided numerous maple sugaring events for schools from West Amwell and Lawrenceville, as well as four public maple sugaring events on weekends in February and March. In addition to our weekend video presentations, we provided programs in forestry and survival to a home school group, scouts and a group from the College of New Jersey. We also offered trail walks and a winter bird walk to our weekend visitors.



Young visitors line up to taste spring sap straight from a sugar maple tree at a winter maple sugaring event in Washington Crossing State Park.

## Spirit of the Jerseys Annual History Fair

Resources from all of NJ Parks and Forestry's historic sites will be highlighted throughout the afternoon at **Washington Crossing State Park**. The event is scheduled for Saturday May 6, 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., rain or shine. Admission is free. Events will be centered around the Visitor Center. For further information call (609) 737-9303.

**CHILDREN'S GAMES \* FIRE ENGINE & EQUIPMENT DISPLAY AND DEMONSTRATION \* LIVING HISTORY ENCAMPMENTS: FRONTIER, REVOLUTIONARY & CIVIL WARS \* STUDENT ART CONTEST \* HAND CANCELLED MAIL & SPECIAL POSTMARK \* SCAVENGER HUNT \* HISTORIC FOODWAYS \* ARTIFACTS & ARCHAEOLOGICAL "DIG" \* WORLD WAR II FIRE CONTROL DEMONSTRATION \* PERIOD TRADE AND CRAFT DEMONSTRATIONS \* MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT \* STORYTELLING \* DANCE ENSEMBLE \* BATTLE OF TRENTON WAR GAMING \* FOOD**



A Blacksmithing demonstration at last year's History Fair



Bloodroot in WCSP

## WILDFLOWERS OF SPRING

Spring is perhaps the most interesting season. At first, it comes in dribs and drabs with the subtle hints of sap flowing in the maples, the arrival of migrating bluebirds or the first few unseasonably warm days of mid- March. By the end of April the season will explode on the scene with naturalistic seasonal events and changes taking place on a daily basis. WCSP harbors a variety of interesting spring wildflowers which begin showing up around the vernal equinox. Keep your eyes open for spring beauties, early saxifrage, bloodroot and cut-leaved toothwort on the forest floor. These plants come in quickly to avoid competing with towering trees. They collect their sunlight, bloom, set seed and then "die back" to the root and bulb all before the leaves develop in the forest canopy. Look for the strange flowers of dutchman's breeches lining the canal towpath early in the season. In May and June wild columbine grows along shale outcrops in the park's stream ravines. Wild geranium, may-apple, jack-in-the pulpit and purple-flowering wood sorrel will grow along woodland trails. Violets, star-of-bethlehem, wild strawberry bladder campion, pussytoes, ox-eye daisy and many other species grow in the park's fields and in forest edges and openings as the season advances. Join us on Sunday May 21, for "Wild Edible Plants", A presentation/ plant walk where edible, medicinal and toxic species will be pointed out and identified. - *WH*

## SPRING PROGRAMS AT THE NATURE CENTER

*The following is a list of activities being offered through the Nature Center at Washington Crossing State Park in Titusville, NJ. Some programs are offered free without registration requirements; some will require advanced registration as indicated below. A fee will be charged to motor vehicles entering the park on weekends and holidays 5/27 - 9/4 (Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day). All programs will initially meet at the Nature Center unless otherwise indicated. Attendance is limited and is available on a first-come, first-served basis. All children must be accompanied by an adult. In the event of inclement weather, some programs might be canceled. It is always advisable to call ahead before coming out. Phone: (609) 737-0609.*

**A TOUR OF OUR NEW SOLAR SYSTEM** (All Ages) Sunday April 2, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. **Dr. Ken Kremer** of the **Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton** will lead this session of astronomical discovery. Participants will experience the beautiful and amazing new discoveries in our solar system at Mars, Saturn, Pluto, comets, the new 10th “Planet” and more. Open to kids of all ages 4 to 84. The program will include a non-technical illustrated presentation, display, 3-D pictures, hands-on activities and take home materials. Solar Telescope viewing to be provided courtesy of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton, weather permitting. Advanced registration required. Free.

**FAMILY NATURE WALK** (All Ages) Saturday April 8, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. This is an informal naturalist-guided trail walk. Free.

**NATIVE AMERICANS OF THE AREA OF THE PARK** (all Ages) Saturday April 22, 1:00 p.m. **Jim Wade**, former archivist and researcher with the N.J. State Museum and **Jim Silk**, regional flintknapper, stone-tool maker, and primitive technologist will discuss primitive stone tool use by Native Americans in central New Jersey. Emphasis will be on the significance and importance of the Indian way of life during the spring season, focusing on the activities of community fish gathering, hunting and village life. The program will include a slide presentation, Native American artifacts and stone tool making demonstration, along with an explanation of Indian dugout canoe making.

**BUILD A ROPE BRIDGE** (8 yrs. - adult) Sunday April 23, 1:30 - 4:00 Participants will learn some basic knots and rope riggings which have been used by survivalists for generations. They will then utilize their newfound skills in constructing a suspended rope bridge which will traverse one of the park's stream beds. Advanced registration required. Free.

**SPRING PARK HIKE** (9 yrs. - adult) Sunday April 30, 1:30 - 4:30 p.m. Sample the splendor of mid-spring including wildflowers, fresh foliage, wildlife, and some infrequently explored sections of the park. on this 3.5 - 5 mile hike in WCSF. Bring drinking water, a snack and spend the afternoon enjoying the landscape. Advanced registration required. Free.

**SPRING BIRD WALK** Sunday May 7, 8:30 a.m. Come and join Lou Beck of Washington Crossing Audubon as we peruse the park for spring migrants and summer resident bird species. Meet at the Nature Center. Free.

**SOLAR OBSERVATION** (all ages) Saturday May 13, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. View magnetic sun storms safely through special filters on two telescopes. Observe sun spots, solar flares, prominences and other solar phenomena Learn how these storms can affect the earth as well as other interesting facts about Earth's closest star. **Gene Ramsey** of the **Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton** will lead this activity. Free. Clear skies required.

**STREAM STOMP** (6 yrs. - adult) Sunday May 14, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. Come out for a wet hike as we follow a park stream in search of crayfish, salamanders, caddisflies, frogs, minnows and other stream inhabitants. Advanced registration required. Free

**SOLAR OBSERVATION** (all ages) Saturday May 20, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m. View magnetic sun storms safely through special filters on two telescopes. Observe sun spots, solar flares, prominences and other solar phenomena Learn how these storms can affect the earth as well as other interesting facts about Earth's closest star. **Gene Ramsey** of the **Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton** will lead this activity. Free. Clear skies required.

**WILD EDIBLE PLANTS** (3 yrs. - adult) Sunday May 21, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. Participants will learn to identify and prepare some of the many native and introduced plants which earlier inhabitants of the area used to supplement their diets. This program will be led by plant lore enthusiast **Pat Chichon** of Lambertville. Bring a pair of plant clippers and a garden trowel. Advanced registration required after 4/11. Materials charge: \$1.00 per participant.

**COMPASS BASICS** (9 yrs - adult) Sunday June 4, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. Participants will learn everything they ever wanted to know about the protractor compass. They will then use their new-found skills to navigate a compass course that will take them over hills, across streams, along trails and through forests to a mysterious hidden site known as "Haunted Hollow". Advanced registration required after 5/2. Bring a protractor compass if you have an instrument of your own. If not, we will provide one. Park vehicle entrance fee applies.

**FAMILY NATURE WALK** (All Ages) Saturday June 10, 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. This is an informal naturalist guided trail walk. Park vehicle entrance fee applies.

**STREAM STOMP** (6 yrs. - adult) Sunday June 18, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. Come out for a wet hike as we follow a park stream in search of crayfish, salamanders, caddisflies, frogs, minnows and other stream inhabitants. Advanced registration required after 5/16. Park vehicle entrance fee applies.

**FAMILY NATURE WALK** (All Ages) Saturday June 24, 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. This is an informal naturalist guided trail walk. Park vehicle entrance fee applies.

## **SPRING PROGRAMS**

### **AT THE VISITOR CENTER/ MUSEUM**

Call (609) 737-9303

**THE 1ST NEW JERSEY REGIMENT'S SCHOOL OF THE SOLDIER.** Saturday, April 8, 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM. The public is invited to observe a Revolutionary War Reenactment Regiment train and prepare for battle. The event is free and will be held at the Visitor Center Museum.

**SPIRIT OF THE JERSEYS ANNUAL HISTORY FAIR.** Saturday, May 6, 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM. Experience three centuries of New Jersey history all in one place. A historical festival for all ages with live music, exhibits, food, historical demonstrations & crafts, dancing, children's activities and more! Free.

**CROSSING DIORAMA PRESENTATION.** Saturday, May 27, 2:00 PM. Visit the Stone Barn opposite the Johnson Ferry House for a Crossing Diorama program. Park vehicle entrance fee applies.



New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection



**Nature**  
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# NATURE'S *Grapevine*

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